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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000027

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SUBJECT: IRAN EXECUTES TWO IN BID TO DETER FUTURE PROTESTS

REF: DUBAI RPO 439

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REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On January 28 Iran executed two men the government has sought to link with the "foreign hands" behind the post-Presidential election unrest. Their executions, coupled with the announcement that six other have also been sentenced to death, while still more detainees face charges likely to draw the death penalty, come less than two weeks before the February 11 anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, a day on which the Green Path Opposition hopes to put significant numbers on the streets. Opposition leaders and activists had initially kept their distance from the two men, whom the government alleges were linked to monarchists and the reviled MEK. However, their executions and the subsequent surge of death sentences and charges punishable by death elicited sharp condemnation by both Mousavi and Khatami. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On January 28 Iran executed two men convicted of "moharebeh" ('warring against God') following one of the show trials held in summer 2009 in the wake of the disputed presidential election. Death sentences for Mohammad Reza Ali Zamani, Arash Rahmanipour and three other men were first issued in October 2009, at which time IRIG officials told the press that four of the men supported the obscure 'Iran Empire Society' ('Anjoman-e Padeshahi-ye Iran) royalist group, accused the fifth of supporting the Mujahedin al-Khalq (MEK), and alleged the men had been engaged in a number of plots supported by the U.S. and Israel designed to destabilize the Islamic Republic, both before and after the election. Initial regime efforts to link Zamani and Rahmanipour group to the election protests puzzled mainstream Green Path Opposition (GPO) leaders and activists because neither man had ties to the popular movement and both were arrested months before the election (reftel). GPO leaders did not comment on the preliminary death sentences, likely hoping to distance themselves from the regime's ploy to cast the popular protests as the product of foreign machinations.

13. (C) However the executions themselves elicited strong and direct after the fact criticism from GPO titular leaders Mousavi and Khatami, as oppositionists both inside and out of Iran condemned the state action as a blatant and brutal effort to intimidate would-be protestors from taking to the streets on the February 11 anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. The criticism was compounded as family members of the two men began to speak publicly about the travesty of justice that led their executions. Rahmanipour's father has been particularly vocal, giving many press interviews in which he called his son "a martyr for democracy" and described how his son was coerced into 'confessing': in one example, the father said his pregnant daughter was imprisoned for

over two months until Arash agreed to confess. According to the father, she miscarried as a result of her imprisonment. Rahmanipour's attorney has also publicly countered Tehran Chief Prosecutor's defense of the judicial process, telling the press that she was not allowed to attend any stage of the proceedings.

14. (S) Ominously, while announcing the two executions January 28 a Judiciary spokesman also told journalists that nine other death sentences are currently before the appeals court awaiting final confirmation. Three of the nine are presumably of the group whose sentences were announced in October. According to a leading human rights advocate based outside of Iran, the other six were tried and convicted in the flurry of trials conducted after Ashura (December 27). Our contact maintains that most (possibly all) of the six had "recently" visited relatives in Iraq and Europe who are in fact MEK members. Though not proper MEK members themselves, several of them may have sent photographs or videos of protests in Iran for use on MEK websites.

15. (S) One January 31, 16 people identified by the government as "Ashura rioters" also went on trial in proceedings broadcast on state television. Five of the 16 have been charged with 'warring against God' and could thus be sentenced to death as well. Reports from family members of the accused based outside of Iran indicate that this group includes a cousin of Sohrab Arabi, a protestor shot by the security forces last July who has become an icon of the

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opposition much like Neda Soltani, and close relatives of one of the seven Bahai leaders also currently on trial.

16. (C) COMMENT: Judiciary Chief Larijani asserted on February 1 that executions levied by Iran's courts would continue regardless of criticism and "political pressure," and during January 30 Tehran Friday Prayers Guardian Council head Ayatollah Jannati praised the executions as "divine justice." Though the real reasons behind the March 2009 arrests of the two men executed January 28 remain murky, the government's unsophisticated efforts to use them to delegitimize the post-election protest movement are clear. With this recent flurry of arrests, trials, convictions and now executions, the government has ratcheted up its campaign to intimidate the GPO on the eve of February 11 planned demonstrations. So far there has been minimal domestic backlash to these executions on either the elite or popular level, and as such it is unclear whether the regime will feel emboldened to continue to execute increasingly important detainees as needed. END COMMENT.
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